Servant of God, Br. Mariyan Mykolayovych Halan C.Ss.R

[Слуга Божий бр. Мар'ян Галан]

Birth and Early Years

Br. Halan was born on September 28th, 1927, in Zhyrivka (Жирівка), a rural village in the Lviv region. Mariyan was the eldest son of the devout Mykola and Maria Halan, the latter of which was the local church's lead cantor and deacon (unclear). He and his two sisters were raised in this devout and rural life, leading a life of hard work and prayer. By this time, his fellow redemptorist martyrs (Bl. Mykola, Vasyl, and Zynoviy) had made their final vows to the Redemptorist order and had already served on missions. With the only exception being his future superior Blessed Ivan Ziatyk, who Mariyan would meet in the later years of his life.

The Only Picture of Mykola Halan

His Father would often take him to observe the liturgy and receive the holy mysteries. It was apparent that our Lord had captured Mariyan's heart from an early age. He would even recreate the liturgy during his playtime: *"he would take a cup, tie strings around it, and cense with it."* His sisters state that he would take a kerchief and tie it around his shoulders, as if it were a phelonion.

His sister says this:

"He would lay a kerchief over his shoulders and tell us, 'Pray, because the Divine Liturgy is starting.' If we didn't want to join in — we were just children — he'd scold us. He'd say, 'Kneel! Pray! The Liturgy is happening!' Even though he didn't yet know the whole service, because he

was still just a boy and hadn't even started going to church regularly. But when he got a bit older, he would go — whether it was cold or not."

He sisters were confused as to what exactly he was doing, all they knew is that he wished to be a priest. Halan already had his heart set on the priesthood as a boy and he had already filled his life with Christ. Even his childish pranks and games were all connected to the church. The blessed martyr bore the fruits of Christ as a young boy and there was no shortage of child-like piety in him. His sister stated:

"Childhood was hard, and Mariyan was very kind. He cared for everyone and helped our parents during those difficult times (there was typhus, and so on)."

He often visited the Basilian Sisters of the village as they ran the local kindergarten, the young boy delighted in participating in the plays they organized. He was a pious and clever lad; at his early age he had a talent for painting and once embroidered a shirt for himself which he wanted very much. Truly, he was wrapped within the love of the Catholic faith at an early age.

Early Stages of Religious Life

Br. Mariyan on the top row, far right.

In 1922, on the outskirts of Lviv in Zboiska, the Redemptorist Fathers opened a juvenate, or what is also called a minor seminary. In September of 1939, this juvenate was closed, as the new authorities forbade the fathers to educate the children. But, by the Grace of God, the Redemptorist School would reopen in June of 1941, after a change of powers in the area. Bl. Vasyl would teach at this school two years before the birth of Mariyan, he would also be ordained as a priest here. In fact, the four redemptorist saints of Ukraine would be taught or formed in this very school. Br. Halan would graduate from school [middle school for Americans] in 1941 at the age of 14. Thus, the future martyr would enter this juvenate where he was to study for six years with the full high school curriculum supplemented by courses in philosophy and theology. He would become a student in the first class of 1941-1942, after the school's reopening. There he studied (though not primarily) under Bl. Mykola Charnetsky, although the school was primarily run by Belgians. Yet, it is unknown what affect the Blessed Martyr had on Br. Mariyan Halan. Still, through this juvenate, two future saints would cross paths; one as student and the other as teacher/leader. Whatever effect Bl. Mykola had on the young saint, this school would no doubt impact the young martyr. It is said that Br. Halan often dreamed of life in the monastery. A friend of the martyr recounts: *"Mariyan was calm, balanced, pious, he dreamed of staying in a monastery. We often talked about this topic, and something drew him there."*

Bl. Mykola Charnetsky, second on the right

It is likely that the Redemptorist missions held in Zhyrivka left a strong impression on him. Even one of his maternal relatives had become a redemptorist missionary with the order in Canada. Life at the juvenate combined study with prayer, participation in the Divine Liturgy, and reception of the Holy Mysteries. The last fifteen minutes of the school day were spent walking around the yard while praying the Rosary. This school was ideal for the young boy - yet the juvenate was *still* like any other high school. As Fr. Ivan Kozovyk, a classmate of Mariyan, recalls:

"We studied—somewhat hungry, somewhat in hunger... Mariyan never harmed anyone. And of course, there were all kinds of things—pulling each other's ears, shoving around. He was a humble boy. And when he laughed—it was so sincere."

Br. Mariyan, second person on the left.

Monastic Vocation

"After the First World War, the Redemptorists visited nearly every village in Halychyna. The charism of their order was to give missions, and what was preached during those missions often became a turning point in people's lives. They preached about life and death, suffering and resurrection — but in a simple, down-to-earth language, without lofty or incomprehensible words. And most importantly, they preached by the example of their own lives."

It seems as if Br. Mariyan had always dreamed of life in union with God. The blessed martyrs longed for the monastery and for monastic life. Notably, his parents had no objection to his potential monastic vocation. After graduating from the juvenate, Mariyan entered the Redemptorist monastery in Lviv, where the abbot at that time was Bl. Ivan Ziatyk, through whose hands he took monastic vows in 1944.

"Before the investiture, everyone was taken to the hospital for a health check," recalls Fr. Kozovyk. The family was late for the ceremony—by the time they arrived from the village in a cart, the investiture had already taken place. Sensitive Mariyan—his sister remembers—cried a lot. "Was it because we weren't at the celebration? I don't know," she recalls.

Not much is known about Br. Mariyan's time in the monastery, but we do know that his first and only run lasted a mere two years (1944-1946). We can say that Br. Mariyan entered the religious life at a particularly challenging time. The young brother entered the monastery at the end of WWII and during the rise of the Bolsheviks and the decline of German occupation in the Lviv region.

Br. Mariyan Halan on the floor to the right.

Liquidation of Church and Vocation

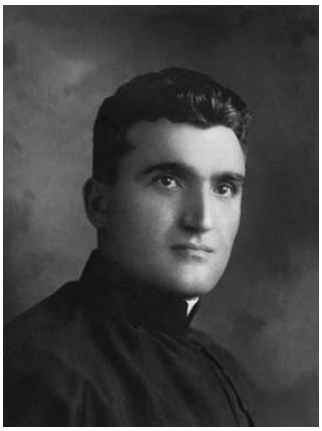
Bl. Vasyl, first on the left

Bl. Vasyl Velychkovsky C.Ss.R recalls these years [1944-1946] saying:

Meanwhile the war rages on... The Germans faltered; the Bolsheviks approached. For some time, evacuations had been underway rapidly. Lviv was nearly emptied of German soldiers and various government offices. Each evening, one of the Fathers, who closely monitored the

frontlines, explained the unfolding situation in detail. One evening, he declared, "The Bolsheviks are near Ternopil!" [Speaking of the status of Ternopil, which he witnessed with his own eyes] *That the front was here, I was well aware-I saw for myself, on a street near the parish church, a shattered soviet tank, and the corpses lying here and there, bruised, and crushed. It seems that, while I was leaving Lviv, the Reds had broken into the town with their tanks, and all of them had been killed; hardly anyone had escaped alive.*

Br. Mariyan entered his monastic journey close to the peak of communist persecution. His brief time in the monastery was no accident, his vocation was forcibly taken by the Bolsheviks. Pat. Josyf Slipyj states that after his arrest, the NKVD began a movement of *"conversion to Orthodoxy."* This movement spread even amongst the devout monks of the Redemptorist order, they firmly refused to do so. This persecution peaked at the Lviv Pseudo-Synod; an initiative which aimed to liquidate the Ukrainian Catholic Church by 'reuniting' them to the Russian Orthodox Church. Of the 216 priests of the council 70% of them were NKVD agents and 16 were laypeople. Suffice to say, the church was liquidated under Stalin's "Instruction 51." Thus, the Redemptorist order was shattered and their priests, both Belgian and Ukrainian, were scattered and the young brothers were drafted into the Military. Since Mariyan was 19 years old at the time, he was sent to military service. His place of service was military unit 81200 "D" in the city of Ufa, Russia. On the eve of the young monks' departure for the Soviet military, their superiors—Fr. de Vocht and the Blessed Fr. Ivan Ziatyk—gave them final guidance: *"Do not forget your Church, do not abandon prayer, and after your service, return to the monastery."*



Fr. Ivan Ziatyk

Military Service

Br. Mariyan Halan on the right

Not much is known about the specifics of his Military Service, but our records show that he passed the time in his usual holiness. Despite the aggressive atheism that circulated through the children of the Komsomol, his peers were not aggressive towards him, nor did they mock him. In fact, they were quite respectful yet puzzled by his character. Everyone noticed his deep faith—how he prayed after meals, wore a medal around his neck, and responded to any remarks denying God's existence by firmly stating that godlessness is a sin. In his letters home, he never complained about anything. He only asked his sisters not to fall for communist lures and not to join the Komsomol. His sisters listened to their older brother—one of them was even expelled from school because of it. He believed in God and did not hide it from others. He wore a cross, was firmly convinced of the truth of Christ's teachings and the Church, refused to join the Komsomol and discouraged others from doing so, saying: *"Komsomol members do not believe in God, and according to my creed, godlessness is a grave sin."* Mariyan never ceased to pray, even while surrounded by walls of firm atheism. His relatives recount this about Halan's Army service:

"You see, when he went into the army, he had a little cross with him. He prayed all the time — he wasn't ashamed of it, even though that was a time when people didn't acknowledge faith at all. But he prayed and wasn't ashamed."

"He prayed the Rosary, too — under his blanket, he would pray. He prayed the way our mother taught us — that was all he had. And whatever they had, they shared. He wrote letters — to

Mama, to his sister, to our relatives. They were simple letters, written in that old Ukrainian script… and he also wrote in Latin. Yes, he even wrote some letters in Latin."

Notably, not even his superiors could find anything bad to say about him. In the service reports and character assessments that would later appear in the case against him for "anti-Soviet activity," one can read the following:

"During his service in military unit 81200 'D', he proved himself to be disciplined, and received no disciplinary penalties. He approached his duties conscientiously and absorbed the material well. He was respected among his comrades but did not participate in the social life of the unit."
"He showed good performance in political and combat training. He is an intelligent and educated person. I did not observe any negative behavior."

The commander of the military unit notes that Br. Halan *"approached his classes conscientiously, mastered the material thoroughly, and was respected among his peers."* At the end of 1949, due to good conduct and excellent marksmanship in competitions, he was granted a ten-day leave. The monk-soldier returned to his native village to see his family, which he had not seen in three years. He was warmly welcomed by his village, and they were overjoyed to see him. His friends say that Mariyan did not complain, nor did he give any indication that he was 'persecuted.' Br. Halan was simply content by the grace of God in seeing his family. His Mother recalls that these ten days passed by quickly, and she lamented that she did not have a chance to *truly* speak with him. Likewise, his sisters recall that he was often not home and that he would be out "looking for his own," searching for fellow clergy or monastics.

His sister states:
"*When he was on that leave, he came and greeted everyone — even my husband — and said, 'I won't be returning from this leave to my unit. I'm going somewhere else.'*
But he didn't say where."

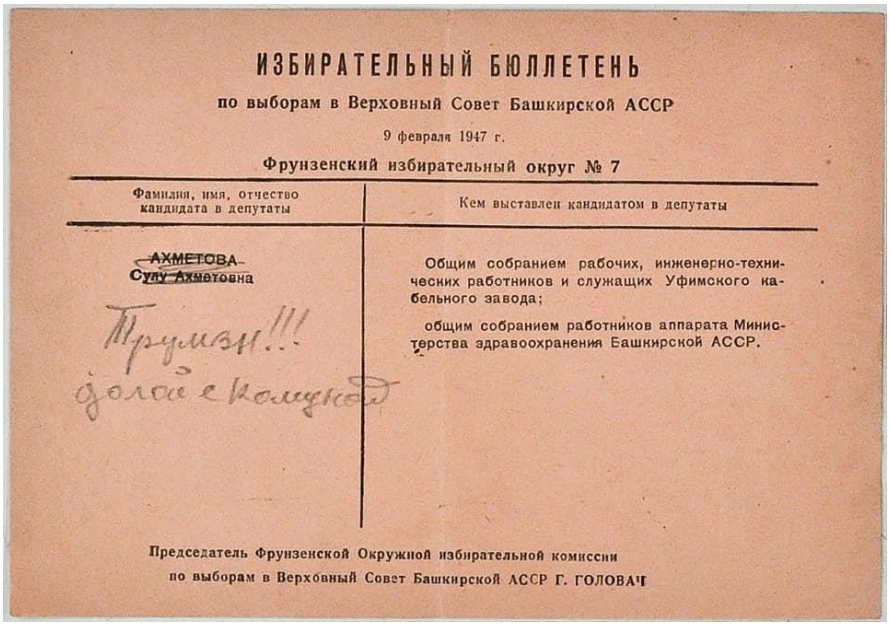
Br. Mariyan at the (unintentional) end of his service

Arrest

A photo taken with Fr. Ivan Kozovyk during his ten-day leave

In the Soviet Union, elections to local legislatures like the Supreme Soviet of the Bashkir ASSR featured only one approved Communist candidate and were tightly controlled by the state. Your vote in favor of this candidate was seen as an affirmation of obedience to the Soviet regime.

During his military service in Ufa (presumably), the young brother openly defied this system by crossing out the candidate's name on his ballot and writing *"Truman!!! Down with the commune,"* referencing U.S. President Harry Truman as a symbol of opposition to Soviet authority. It is unknown why authorities took so long to respond to this act of defiance, as this picture gives the date "1947." Regardless, this incident would be used to build the case against Br. Mariyan.



ИЗБИРАТЕЛЬНЫЙ БЮЛЛЕТЕНЬ

по выборам в Верховный Совет Башкирской АССР

9 февраля 1947 г.

Фрунзенский избирательный округ № 7

Фамилия, имя, отчество кандидата в депутаты	Кем выставлен кандидатом в депутаты
~~АХМЕТОВА~~ Сулу Ахметовна Трумэн!!! долой коммуну	Общим собранием рабочих, инженерно-технических работников и служащих Уфимского кабельного завода; общим собранием работников аппарата Министерства здравоохранения Башкирской АССР.

Председатель Фрунзенской Окружной избирательной комиссии
по выборам в Верховный Совет Башкирской АССР Г. ГОЛОВАЧ

On January 21st, 1950, Br. Mariyan's ten-day leave was over. Br. Mariyan headed back to the military unit, but it is unclear whether he made it back to his unit, as there are two differing accounts on this. According to the Redemptorist Website of Lviv, Br. Halan was served a search warrant, during which authorities found a book written by St. Alphonsus Liguori, who is the founder of the Redemptorists. He was promptly arrested for *"anti-Soviet activities."* During the interrogation, an officer why he decided to enter the monastery, he replied: *"Being a religious man, I decided to devote my whole life to serving God, which is why I became a monk."*

Br. Mariyan upon his arrest

Another source says he was arrested on his train back to his military unit because of *"anti-Soviet activity."* Regardless, During his investigation and interrogation, he was kept in *"horrific basement cells"* which sometimes reached knee deep in water. The cell he was kept in was such that he couldn't sit or lie down. His interrogations would last for hours in these decrepit conditions. During interrogation, he would say:

"I consider myself guilty of the fact that, while serving in the Soviet army, I engaged in religious propaganda in conversations with certain servicemen—I said that I believe in God and that God exists."

Others in who knew Br. Mariyan through the military would testify the following against him in private interrogations:
"From the outside, it looked like he was doing well in political studies. But in reality, he wore an icon medallion around his neck and never took it off. He prayed to God in secret, away from his friends."

"I know that Halan argued with several servicemen about the existence of God. In particular, he debated with Private Soveliev, who had given him an anti-religious magazine to read. During these debates, Halan referred to some kind of authoritative religious scholars — I don't remember their names — or to teachers."

Throughout all sources, they cannot cease to testify to Br. Mariyan's piety and love for God. Still, the conditions of prison and interrogation would become detrimental to his health and the young brother would fall gravely ill with tuberculosis.

Final Years

In 1948, the Volga–Don Canal was commissioned under Joseph Stalin to enable a direct water route between the Caspian and Azov Seas. The canal and its facilities were built by about 900,000 workers including some 100,000 German POWs and 100,000 gulag prisoners. A day spent at the construction yard was counted as three days in prison, which spurred the prisoners to work. On April 25, 1950, the Military Tribunal of the South Ural Military District sentenced Mariyan Mykolayovych Halan, for anti-Soviet agitation under Article 58-10, a notorious Soviet law used to punish "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda." Br. Mariyan was to 10 years of penal labor to build to Volga-Don Canal in Russia. Mariyan addressed the judges, saying: *"Personally, no one ever forbade me from believing in God. I even wore a cross until recently. Faith in God was instilled and strengthened in me during the two years I spent in the Redemptorist monastery (I took vows there in 1944). According to our teaching, godlessness is a great sin."* By the time Mariyan had arrived, his health was already destroyed, and he would enter the final two years of life. This eventual fate was not lost on Halan as he would become increasingly more aware of his coming death in his final letters. The young man wrote that he was feeling unwell, that there was no end in sight to the treatment—though, *"the end seems more visible"* and *"Don't grieve too much over my loss."* He already understood that he would not return home, and that he would never become a priest, as he had dreamed. Still, he would say, *"as God wills,"* using those words to comfort both himself and his family. His health was rapidly declining, and he no longer had the strength to hold his pen and could only gather the strength to eat a single apple from his mother's parcel.

Death

In June of 1952, his mother, Maria would have a vision while milking their cows in the barn. She had a vision of Jesus Christ in his crown of the thorns standing in the corner. She wondered for a long time what that vision could mean. Only later would she understand that Christ himself showed that her son was no longer alive. Our Lord's crown of thorns signified the unity in martyrdom and suffering that Br. Mariyan Halan had with Jesus. Br. Mariyan had died on June 5th, 1952, at the age of 25 from a sudden pulmonary hemorrhage—a common complication of tuberculosis. His final letter was written by a friend of Halan and was received by Halan's father. Mykola initially hid this letter from his wife, as he could not bring himself to tell him the terrible news. Only when she said, *"It's been a long time without a letter from Mariyan,"* did he reply, *"There won't be any more."* And only then did he hand her the letter. Mariyan's friend wrote the following: *"As hard as it is to write, I must fulfill the last request of my dearest comrade, a brother in faith, like a beloved little brother—though younger in years—and your dearest son, who passed away on June 5 at 6 p.m. I was with him the whole time in prison. In his final days, he was very ill, and I helped him as much as I could. But neither I nor the doctors could keep him from death—that was God's will."* Echoing the sentiment of Br. Mariyan *"as God wills."* His sister says this about his final moments:

"His friend wrote about how he died. He said Mariyan was already very weak — these were his final words. A nurse came into the room, and he even said goodbye to her. The doctor rushed in — they were still trying to save him — but Mariyan had already said goodbye to everyone.
In the end, he said a very long prayer, and he passed away in that prayer.
He had a cross sewn into his shirt.
Afterward, we took that cross and laid it on his chest and gave him an icon — he had one. And that's how he was buried.
But where exactly he was buried… who knows?"

Final Thoughts

The young and pious martyr died in Stavropol, Kuybyshev region and to this day no one knows where he is buried. All we can say is that he, along with his dreams of priestly service, was buried in that grave. Mariyan Halan… In a modest hospital room, a young man was quietly passing into eternity. He was only 25. No family was nearby—only a friend who had shared with him the burden of exile in a distant land. He died with a prayer on his lips. His name was Mariyan Halan. He was a Redemptorist monk, with an extraordinarily strong faith in God—a faith he carried through his short life and was never afraid or ashamed to profess, even before peers indoctrinated with Komsomol ideals, which surprised them. He lived a humble and quiet life. And now, sixty years after his death, his name is known primarily to his family, the monks of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, and those involved in the beatification process of modern Ukrainian martyrs. He was the youngest on the list of about 50 individuals whom the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church presented to the Vatican for beatification in 2001.

To quote his friend, Fr. Ivan:

"In the end, whether he becomes a saint or not, he's already in heaven.
You already know that. But we want to declare him a saint so that he can be an example for the youth — a model.
Because what is a saint? A saint is someone who truly showed heroic action —
But not just the kind of heroism where someone throws themselves on a grenade.
*A saint is someone who does the **daily**, **ordinary**, **simple work** —*
Even when they're capable of much more — but still do what they're given to do.
That's who he was. He was sincere. He didn't take offense at anyone, and he never offended anyone.
But he gave his life for Christ. That's the point.
That's the point, you see. And that point revealed his heart.
Because when the moment comes — no one can fake it.
That kind of decision, that center point — it only happens if a person has been preparing interiorly their whole life.
No one becomes a hero by accident. You don't just step up in the moment.
A saint — we can say is a hero — because he showed heroic virtues.
The kind of virtues where, when the moment came and he could have changed his life,
He said no.
He rejected all the comforts and privileges — even when he was suffering."

Br. Mariyan Halan, middle row, far right.

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